CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Wegner Creek Bridge
Proposed Implementation Date:	Summer 2012
Proponent:	Montana DNRC and Sterling Ranch
Location:	16, T15N, R2W
County:	Lewis & Clark
Trust:	Common Schools

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Eliminate the existing unimproved ford crossing on Wegner Creek, and replace with a 36' skewed bridge to provide log truck access through to state and private lands in Stickney Creek and to provide better all season access for the ranching operations.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Montana FWP for the "124" permit

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

none

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternate access possibilities have been researched for many years, with renewed efforts since last December. Various different routes were reviewed on the ground, each being found impossible due to massive rock outcrops. Alternate routes involving other ownerships (Stickney Subdivision) were also considered, but not preferred due to the large number of parties involved. There is a longer route (12.8 miles from Blacktop to section 15, T15N, R2W) which can get log trucks and ranch vehicles to this same general area. If this bridge is installed the route to the same point from the black top is reduced to 7.5 miles, a savings one way of 5.3 miles, or 10.6 miles saved every round trip.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Soil conditions are stabile at the bridge site. Rock outcrops are common in the area and become the limiting factor when various alternatives are considered. Stream flow is straight through the segment where the bridge is proposed. A 36' steel bridge has been proposed to allow for a full span of the stream to prevent any constriction of flow which would initiate bank erosion.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Water quality is good in this area. The stream width is approximately 14' between the Ordinary High Water Marks. The crossing currently used is a ford, unimproved, which provides sediment delivery at each use. In addition, the trail to the ford on the east side runs parallel to the stream bank for over 100'.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The project is not expected to have any affects to air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

The only vegetation disturbance related to the project would be the brush within the planned road width on the west bank. Not directly related to the project is the spotted knapweed patch infestation on the east bank. The improved access of the bridge would allow for easier treatment of this area into the future.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Wegner is a fish bearing stream. Elimination of the ford, reclamation of the unimproved approaches and shifting of use to a bridge should reduce adverse effects to fisheries.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Due to the small scope of the project, no adverse affects are expected. There are no T&E species known to exist at this site.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

There are no cultural resources observed or know to exist at this site.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The bridge site is in the Wegner creek drainage, a deep and winding stream course, and is not visible from anywhere.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

No limited resources or cumulative affects are anticipated.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

Both the DNRC and the Sterling Ranch have been conducting timber salvage operations on their respective lands west of Wegner Creek, The DNRC timber permit for these operations is named the Mohican Wagner Salvage, conducted under an Environmental Action Checklist completed in December 2011.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No effects anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The trail to the ford and the ford, provided limited seasonal access potential for ranch operations and no potential for log truck/forest management access. An alternate route to reach state and private forest lands east of the stream does exist, but that route is 5.3 miles longer, one-way, than could be achieved by the installation of a bridge at this location. For low value timber salvage operations, hauling costs with an extra 10.6 mile round trip on low standard road can adversely affect the economic viability of the operations.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

No measurable affects to employment are anticipated. Project installation would require a few days for a small crew, at most.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No affects to tax base

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

No increase or affects to government services would be expected.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

None

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The state land at section 16, T15N, R2W is fully surrounded by private land, and thus only accessible for recreational use with adjacent land owner permission. The Sterling Ranch does allow controlled levels of hunting access each season.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

No affects anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No affects anticipated.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

No affects anticipated.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

There would be no direct return to the trust from the installation of this bridge (and reclamation of the ford and approaches). The most immediate benefit would be for ongoing salvage operations on the private lands in section 15, T15N, R2W. There are added stands of timber on the state lands in 10, 14, and 16, T15N, R2W (east of Wegner Cr.) which have been heavily impacted by the ongoing Mountain Pine Beetle infestation. DNRC will likely propose salvage harvest for these areas later in 2012, after additional reconnaissance is completed to allow for proposal development. Once proposed, that project would be reviewed under a separate Environmental Assessment, and if approved directly benefit the installation of a bridge here.

At present, DNRC and the Sterling Ranch have been operating under a reciprocal temporary road use agreement with no use fee to either party. This arrangement is due to the limited commercial viability of the salvage operations in the current timber market.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	D.J. Bakken	**Date:**	6/6/2012
	Title:	Helena Unit Manager		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Pending approval of a 124 permit from FWP, I have selected the alternative to install the bridge and reclaim the existing ford.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

Replacing the ford with a clear span bridge will reduce some sediment delivery to Wegner Creek. Improving the access here with the bridge will reduce the mileage of road use to reach the area by 5.3 miles. Future forest product hauling costs would be reduced, with commensurate potential to increase stumpage costs.

There are no anticipated direct, indirect or cumulative adverse affects anticipated.

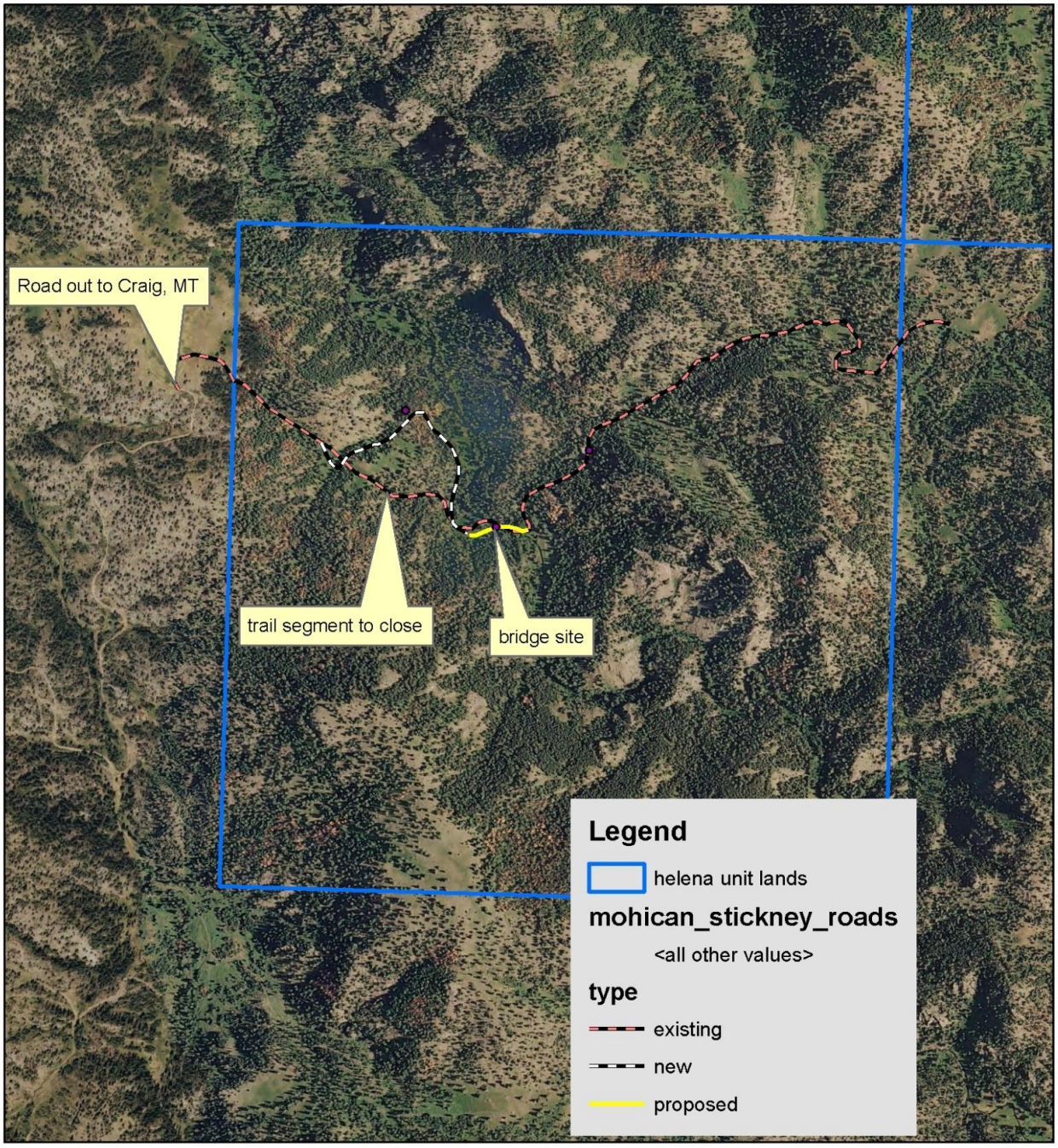
27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

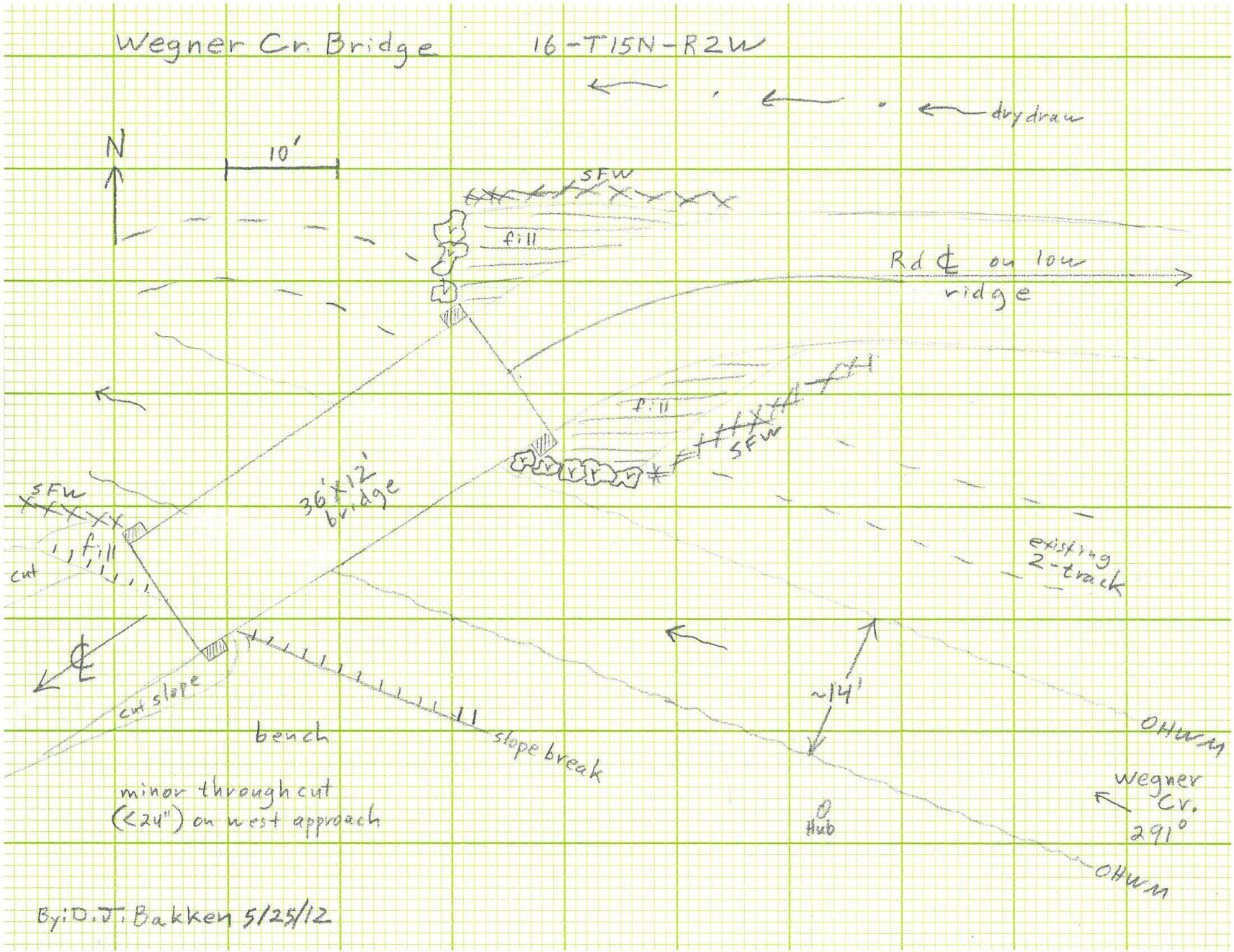
[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Gavin Anderson
	Title:	CLO Forest & Land Program Manager
Signature: 	**Date**:	6/7/2012

Wegner Creek Bridge

16, T15N, R2W




Wegner Cr. Bridge
16-T15N-R2W
dry draw
N
10'
SFW
fill
Rd ℄ on low ridge
fill
SFW
SFW
36'x12' bridge
fill
cut
existing 2-track
℄
cut slope
bench
slope break
~14'
OHW
minor through cut (<24") on west approach
Hub
wegner Cr. 291°
OHW
By: D.J. Bakken 5/25/12